



8TH MEETING OF THE SPRFMO COMMISSION

Port Vila, Vanuatu, 14 to 18 February 2020

COMM 8 – Report ANNEX 11a Commission Chairperson Opening Statement

Mr Osvaldo Urrutia

The Honourable Charlot Salwai, Caretaker Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu, distinguished Head of Delegations and delegates of Commission's Members, Cooperating NCPs and observers; ladies and gentlemen:

It is again my honour to speak before you to open the 8th Meeting of the Commission of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation at Port Vila, on this marvellous archipelago where the importance of the oceans and marine resources is self-evident. On behalf of the SPRFMO Commission and its CNCPs, I want to say that we are grateful to the Government of Vanuatu for agreeing to host this 8th Commission Meeting. We are also thankful to Vanuatu's private fisheries sector whose support was pivotal in organising and hosting our meeting in such wonderful premises.

Before addressing some of the substantive issues we have ahead of us, I cannot continue without referring to the consequences of the global health emergency that has affected our work. Due to precautionary measures adopted by the Government of Vanuatu, several of our colleagues from China and Chinese Taipei were prevented from attending this meeting. Although these two members are today officially represented amongst us, it is quite obvious that the complex negotiations and discussions we need to hold – many of them on issues of technical nature – have been and will continue to be seriously limited by the fact that our friends from Beijing and Taipei are not here. I would therefore urge members to show as much consideration and restraint as possible, considering that the absence of these Members' delegates was due to unexpected reasons that we all regret. It is our responsibility at this meeting to prevent future misunderstandings and ensure the legitimacy of the measures we adopt.

Please allow me to move to some of the substantive matters we need to address this week. I will not speak about all the proposals in place, many of which we have already discussed, at least partially. I would rather like to focus on two relevant topics that I believe are of the highest priority for this meeting, and where we should lead our efforts constructively and pragmatically.

The first one relates, obviously, to the Jack Mackerel fishery. It is no secret that due to the coastal catches of Peru in 2019 we have exceeded the limit set out last in 2019 as the TAC for the whole range of the stock. We all know the numbers and I need not go into them now. This is a delicate situation and a source of serious concern for most members. Yet we also know that this is not the first time that we must face such a challenge. It is then worth reminding this distinguished audience of the words of the first Chairperson of this Commission, Mr Bill Mansfield, when he addressed the 2014 meeting, referring to the situation of the JM stock during the early years when the SPRFMO Convention was negotiated. He pointed out that – and I quote –

“Cooperation is especially important with regard to stocks like jack mackerel that straddle coastal state economic zones and the high seas. Obviously a stock cannot be managed sustainably if, in the years in which it is concentrated in the high seas it is over fished by distant water fleets and in years in which it is concentrated in economic zones it is over fished by vessels authorised by the relevant coastal states”.

Mr Mansfield's words, based on the LOS Convention and UNFSA, and indeed in rules of international customary law, still resonate as the only possible path to achieve what we all want: a sustainable fishery that



can justify sustainable fishing by the members of our Commission. We are today fortunate that the JM stock is certainly in a healthier condition than seven or eight years ago. SPRFMO now reaps the benefits of the hard but necessary measures we adopted back then to prevent the collapse of the fishery, allowing us to move towards its recovery.

Although we are now in a different scenario, we must be guided by those same principles that underpin sustainable fisheries management. The text of the SPRFMO Convention contains such rules to help us solve situations like the one we have in front of us, including on compatibility. All members of the Commission, both coastal states and distant water nations, ought to engage in the fullest degree of cooperation required to achieve constructive solutions to avoid that such episodes happen again in the future. The good news is that, given the positive history of SPRFMO, the high technical capacity and personal commitment of our delegates, I am genuinely optimistic that the spirit of cooperation we have built as one of the hallmarks of SPRFMO will prevail, once again.

On a closely related note, I would also like to remind SPRFMO members that we will discuss, as in previous years, a proposal from Ecuador concerning the JM fishery. Members may wish to reconsider the fact that the current scheme of allocation does not allow Ecuador to fulfil its legitimate aspirations as coastal state. It is perhaps time for SPRFMO members to consider practical solutions to accommodate one of our historical members and a relevant fishing state in the Eastern Pacific.

The second important issue I would like to mention at this opening speech concerns the functioning of our organisation and particularly the work of the SPRFMO Secretariat. The leadership of Dr Sebastian Rodriguez as our Executive Secretary was consolidated during 2019. He has made a terrific job in reorganising the Secretariat, updating and improving its standards of work. As I have the privilege of serving the role of Commission Chairperson in Wellington, I have seen first-hand how the SPRFMO Secretariat has become a highly motivated group of people that show professionalism and commitment.

Yet Members need to know that all these improvements have come at a cost. SPRFMO has grown significantly in terms of burdens and responsibilities over the last intersessional years. We have now 20 CMMs to manage, covering one of the biggest high seas area managed by any RFMOs, including what is probably the largest fleet in the world. As the workload of our Secretariat has intensified substantially, SPRFMO has a tight budget that is limiting our performance capacity. This trend is becoming clear as more responsibilities and workload are coming in the foreseeable future. If our organisation is to grow and undertake more responsibilities, then we must ensure the support of the Commission, including appropriate funding. We have got to stop the current trend and seriously discuss what kind of organisation we want and the employer we want to be.

With this background I would then urge you all to engage at this meeting in the key work of the FAC, which will need to address several proposals and deal with the SPRFMO budget, staff issues, strategic priorities and administrative obligations for the forthcoming future. I invite all members to look at all these matters closely, constructively and as informed as possible.

Before closing, I would like to take the opportunity to express my appreciation to the US delegation for their voluntary contribution to the budget and activities of SPRFMO during 2019. I also want to thank each delegation and delegate to this Commission, and especially to the Secretariat staff and Mr Rodríguez himself, as well as the Chairs of the SPRFMO subsidiary bodies: Jim Ianelli from the US, Kerrie Robertson from Australia and Andy Wright from NZ, for your support and advice during 2019 as Chairperson of the Commission.

With these words, I am pleased to declare the 8th meeting of the SPRFMO Commission open.

Thank you very much.